

sps 7·8 vol 4 #2

**The literary magazine of the 7th and 8th grades
Somerville, Massachusetts**



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**The literary magazine of the 7th and 8th grades
Somerville, Massachusetts**

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submissions: students entering 7th and 8th grades in September 2019 are encouraged to submit your fiction, poetry, essays, critique, and other writing beginning now. Email your work to happeningmagazine@yahoo.com. Scanned original artwork to be considered for illustration or covers may also be submitted.

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The Writers' Den Poetry Wall: A large selection of poetry from students in all grades appears online at 12zine.com. Please visit and read.

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The Cut

Cindy Luxama

“Can you tell us exactly what happened, please?” the police officer asked me.

The pain in my ear still hadn’t stopped. I wanted to see what it looked like. I wanted to know what had happened. My mom stood there, freaking out next to me. She looked worried and scared, and her hands were shaking. Was it *really* that bad?

The day started out as regularly as any day would have. I woke up, took a bath, ate, and played with my toys. A few hours later, my mom went grocery shopping.

I was seven years old at the time. All I ever did was play with my toys or my siblings and run around the house, which is what I did for most of the morning. After a while, my grandmother went to give

each of my siblings a bath. My baby brother was only a few months old, and I didn't want to leave him alone in the living room, so I went over to play with him. When my siblings were done with their shower, they went to their rooms to change and wet the floor as they went. I quickly forgot about the wet floor when I went back to playing with my little brother. That was when he started crying. Using what I knew from TV, I had to get his bottle and I had to get it *fast*. I quickly skipped up to the counter to get the bottle. As I went, I slipped right on the puddle of water and fell, next to the glass table.

"*Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!*" I screamed from the pain that came to my ear. Tears ran out of my eyes like a waterfall. My grandmother rushed over to me.

"Cindy, Cindy! What happened!?" she asked me as she helped me up from the ground. I could tell from the way she talked that she was worried.

I was crying loudly. My siblings came over to see what happened. The pain was *awful*, I wanted it to go away. My grandmother left to call my mom. She then took me to the front door so we could wait.

"I don't know what happened, her ear is bleeding." My grandmother was talking with my mom, but I wasn't listening.

The pain got even worse and I cried louder. I wanted to look at my ear and was about to put a hand to it, but my grandmother stopped me and handed me the phone.

"Cindy, what's going on? What happened?" my mom asked me frantically.

I put the phone to my right ear, "I-I was going to get..." I couldn't talk.

I was crying so much that it started to get harder to catch my breath.

"Cindy, what happened? Tell me!" my mom asked again.

I tried to explain to her, but I just couldn't stop crying! My grandmother took the phone from me and continued talking with my mom. After a few minutes, my mom's car pulled up in the driveway and she rushed out. My grandmother opened the door and we went outside. My mom took one look at my ear and started to freak out.

"Cindy, what did you do? Were you running? Did you fall?" my mom asked me as my grandmother tried to explain what she saw happen.

I couldn't calm down enough to explain to her, so my mom decided to call 911. Not much later an ambulance, firetruck, and two police cars had come and stopped in front of our house. I had stopped crying by then and was surprised to see them all there, all at once, in front of *my* house. It made me wonder how badly I hurt my ear. I sat inside my mom's car, and a police officer came up to me to take a look at my ear. My mom stood close by with a stressed and worried look on her face. I wanted to see what was wrong with my ear, but my mom and grandmother wouldn't let me see it. The pain had started to go away. I thought that maybe all it needed was a Band-Aid.

"What happened?" the officer asked my mom first, but since I wasn't able to explain it to her while crying, she didn't know. So he turned to me.

"Can you tell me what happened?" he asked.

"I was going to get my little brother's bottle," I sniffed, "But the floor was wet and I fell."

As he continued to ask me questions, one of the ambulance drivers came up and bandaged my ear. For a second, I thought that was it, and that I was all better and I could go back inside, but instead, we drove to the hospital.

We didn't go to our regular hospital; instead, we went to one that was closer to our house. A kind nurse brought me and my mom into one of the hospital rooms. The room was small, smaller, it seemed, than the rooms at our regular hospital, but I could still smell that usual weird hospital smell. I sat on the bed and she started asking me questions. After I explained what had happened to me, she took off my Band-Aid. There was blood all over it, and now I *really* wanted to see what my ear looked like. The nurse explained to my mom that I was going to have to get stitches because my earlobe had split in two, almost as if it had been cut by a pair of scissors! She told us that we would be going to another doctor's room to get them. I didn't know what stitches were and hoped they didn't hurt.

The nurse led us to the room where I would be getting the stitches. This room was much bigger and there was a large window that looked out onto the parking lot. I sat on the hospital bed, and my mom sat in one of the chairs. She looked very nervous and upset and fidgeted a lot. I felt bad for putting her through all of this trou-

ble. After a few minutes, the doctor came in with more equipment. He introduced himself to my mom and asked me a few questions, then he made me lie down on my side so he could stitch my ear. He pressed his foot onto one of the many buttons that controlled the bed and the lights, and the hospital bed lowered, reminding me of the dentist. Then he got to work on my ear. First, he cleaned off all of the dried blood, which made me wince a little, and I hoped I wouldn't start crying again. Then he started to stitch my ear. Soon, it began to rain, and I closed my eyes and listened to the rain tap against the window. After some time, my dad, grandparents, and siblings came to the hospital. With great interest my siblings watched the doctor work. When the doctor was done, I had barely noticed, but at the same time, it felt like an eternity. The doctor said that I had done a good job and gave me some stickers as a reward. Then he explained to my parents that I was lucky that my ear wasn't any worse than it already was. He said that if the cut was any larger, I would have messed up my ear permanently. We drove home and the first thing I did when I got there was look in the mirror. The suture was blue, and for some reason I really liked it. To me, it felt like an earring, and I wanted to show all my friends.

My mom was still shaken by my ear and told me that she had to leave the groceries behind so she could get to me quickly. That made me feel guilty, including the fact that I had put everyone under a lot of stress. We searched the living room for any sign that might show where I got the cut, but for some odd reason, we couldn't find anything.

“Cindy, are you sure you weren't running?” My parents had asked me this question about a hundred times that day.

And every time they asked me, I had the same reply, “No, I wasn't running. I was walking. And skipping, but only a little bit!”

© 2019 Cindy Luxama

Feline Friends

Wendy Guo

It was two days before Halloween. The 29th of October. THAT day wasn't a good day. My mood swings were even having mood swings. I had sore legs from volleyball practice, had just pages and pages of homework, and my mom and I got into a fight about some-

thing random. It was a bad fight so we didn't talk for about three hours.

My sister usually comes home at 6. But this time she came home around 7 with an announcement that we are gonna get a feline friend. She showed me some of the pictures of the cats from the original owners. I did have to admit, they were adorable. I've never had a pet, well I'm pretty much lying. I HAD 20 fish. I emphasize "had" because all my fish died by one of my good friends that committed the cruel act of putting detergent in my little pond area. Where my fish lived. That wasn't a good day either. I'm not a bit mad at the fact that she did that but, I'm MAD MAD. This shows how much experience with pets of the sort. Little to no experience was not a good start to taking care of a whole cat. Anyways, that was a long flashback to my fish, but back to the story. My mom and I basically bonded over the fact that we were going to get a cat. We completely forgot that we fought and moved on with our lives. I was excited that I was going to have a pet again. My mom just wanted a cat so we can get rid of all the mice we had. I hated mice but I wanted a cat, so I could finally tell everyone I got a pet. When my sister got home that night, she said she would go to the owners house after work, to get our new cat.

I actually went trick or treating on Halloween. I went walking home after trick or treating, hoping with every last hope in me that there would be a cat at home. I walk in and there's a box. My sister and mom told me that they're hiding. I didn't catch on that she said "they." I thought we got one cat, but we actually got two. I tried to find the two cats that were hiding from me underneath the couch. No luck.

I woke up the next day with one of the cats sleeping on my bed. I was shocked, but I was also almost late for school. Not necessarily late for school, but late waking up. My mom and sister were discussing names without me. I heard something about a potato, maybe dinner ideas? I stopped paying attention and started to get ready. The cats stared at me as I walked out the house to school, it was a bit creepy, I admit.

I got home from school that same day and my sister was home. She told me one was Potato and one was Mia. I couldn't blink. I had nothing against potatoes but I felt bad for Potato because she

was named Potato. There was an unbalance in the universe when one of your cats is named Potato.

I remember one time while I was trying to wash both of the cats. Remind you, I have little to no experience. I had to learn the hard way about washing cats. I've always heard that cats do not like water. I had to see for myself. It was hard just to keep the cats in the tub. I would get Mia then Mia would escape as I'm getting Potato. It was difficult but then I just grabbed both and carried them to the bathtub. Just 2 seconds after I turned on the water, they quickly ran out and into my room. They started hiding and I couldn't find them. There was so much water on the floor that it lead me to where they were. I tried carrying them back in but once they saw the bathtub, they escaped my grasp and ran away again. They actually never got cleaned.

Taking care of cats is actually very hard. Having to feed them, wash them, playing with them, and making sure they don't hurt themselves. After a while of just doing all of those, my family got tired of doing so. I had a lot of homework so I couldn't play with them a lot. My sister was studying for the DAT (Dental Admission Test). She is taking it to get into dental school. My mom has to clean, cook, and go to work. My dad goes to work during the day and can't take care of the cats. So I, had to. It was the most tiring thing of my day. Every time I would stop playing with them, and try to relax or do homework, they would meow for long periods of time, until I gave them more attention and toys. My sister wanted to get them back to the original owner and help find new people that would want to take the cats. My mom wanted the cats so mice would go away. They got into a fight about that. Then my sister ended up secretly giving them back, a week after we got them, without my mom knowing.

The cats ended up actually making me feel happier. Having a pet definitely had a positive impact on me and my family. My family and I grew closer. This was the first time my family and I grew closer in a very long time.

All ended well, except for my house. My house still has mice. My mom forgets about the situation occasionally. The cats made our lives happier, until the work kicked in. I felt it was the best choice giving them back, so I can live and do my work. And that was the

long story of how my getting cats for a week really taught me the lesson of responsibility and how much my mother hated mice.

© 2019 Wendy Guo

Friday afternoon

Yasmine Ramos

“Why didn't you answer my phone calls,” said my sister.

“I was in a meeting of debate. Why? What happened?” I said worriedly

“Ma-mamita Lidia died this morning,” she said, stuttering.

I was so shocked when my sister told me that my great-grandma had died that morning while we were at school. A few seconds later my phone started ringing and it was my dad.

“Hello, what are you doing, Yasmine?” asked my dad.

“Nothing, getting home from school. How about you, dad ?”

“Nothing, working like always. Listen I need to tell you something but I need you to stay calm”

“Yes, what happened?” I answered anxiously.

“Your mama Lidia died this morning. She was very sick since Thursday...” he started to explain. “She barely made it to the hospital but once she got there they said it was too late and she was gonna pass away very soon,” he said.

“I can't believe it, are you serious? How is my grandma? Have you talked to her today?” I said with a very sad and worried voice.

“Yes, I talked to her over the phone when your aunt was at the hospital with her. Give her a call today honey. I need to go back to work. I love you.”

“Okay bye, I love you too dad”

I couldn't believe what had just happened. My great-grandma has been the world to me. She has been with me since I was a baby. I loved and still love my great-grandma and I miss her every day even more to know the fact that I wasn't able to see her for one last time as I wished. I used to see my great-grandma when I would go to El Salvador. She would always cook with my grandma yummy food when we would be with them. I was so attached to her.

In my family, she was the one who would always tell us we have to always appreciate, love and care for each other no matter what. She had been sick for a while now and high blood pressure has

been something common in our family and she died because her blood pressure was too high and she didn't make it nor went on time to the hospital.

October 12, 2018, was the day she passed away and went to heaven with my great-grandpa. I loved and still love my great-grandma. She has been a very special part of me and will always be. I know that now she's watching over me and seeing and guiding me to do the right things. I miss her every day and I will never forget her but I will always remember things always happen for a reason nothing is forever and I have to live my life always as if she were still alive.

© 2019 Yasmine Ramos

Microwave Incident

Karolayne Rodrigues

About two years ago I was home alone. I was just cleaning for my mom, you know, so when she got home I wouldn't have to hear, "Voce não faz nada em casa" ("you never do anything at home") etc.

Later that day I was just in the living room watching TV it was around 2ish and I'm starving all I could hear was my stomach rumbling as if it was begging for food. Right when I was about to go look for food my mom texts me saying that there's Ramen in the cabinet. I shoot up from the couch, I'm ravenous. Not wanting to waste any time I grab the ramen from the cabinet, put it into a bowl and straight into the microwave it went. I set 5 minutes and back to the living room I went.

Hoping that time would go by faster I turn on the TV again. If you haven't noticed yet I was very hungry. When I was putting the ramen in the bowl all I was thinking about was the faster I put it in the faster it will cool down so the faster I would be able to eat it.

A good three minutes have gone by. I start smelling something burning; I instantly shoot up run to the microwave remembering I didn't put water in the bowl...

I got up so fast I felt a breeze pass by making me lose balance but I keep going as if I'm in a race with myself. I open up the microwave and take out the bowl. It smelt so bad all I see is the ramen starting to burn through the plastic bowl. I stare at it as if I'm admiring it. It

was as if I was moving in slow motion, my brain wasn't working everything didn't, seem like it was clicking.

Then reality hits me and I start panicking, pacing back and forth then I start freaking out when I realize I have to tell my mom that I almost burned down the house. I pick up my phone. As I was about to call my mom I remember my aunt lives nearby. I was almost relieved, my heart was racing less, I had hope. So I call her, repeating over and over (please answer, please answer..) then....

SHE ANSWERS!!!! I was so happy and relieved I even stopped pacing back and forth.

She had answered. She goes, "Oi Karol" ("Hey Karolayne").

"Oi tia tudo bem eu queria ver se você pode me ajudar" ("Hey I would like to know if you can help me") etc.

She was over my house in the next 30 minutes and we started cleaning. Let me tell you guys, my aunt is the plug; she even took me out to eat later once we were done cleaning. It was great, it sort of helped me forget the fact that I still had to tell my mom what had happened. Later my mom comes home and I tell her what had happened and she just laughed. To this day she makes fun of me but I was relieved because I honestly thought she was going to yell at me. But lesson learned never rush anything because the result won't be pretty.

© 2019 Karolayne Rodrigues

Jade: The Life and Death

Isabella Jannuzzi

The first time that my dad met Jade was during a harsh blizzard, more than fifteen years ago. He lived in Revere at the time, in a puny house with a roommate I never met. I believe my parents were only dating at the time. Jade, who was only a fragile kitten, wandered up to my dad's porch and meowed loudly, hoping for any sort of attention.

She was a black cat with bright green eyes. She was cold and shaking, but she was strong. Strong enough to survive the blizzard.

When my dad came onto the porch, he was utterly surprised to see a kitten sitting there, looking up at him. Jade wouldn't leave my dad alone. When he took Jade inside, she followed him everywhere, like a duckling and mother duck.

Jade was now my dad's cat, once a stray, completely turned into a loving housecat. He had two cats before Jade, Stony and Midnight. They were deceased before Jade came into the picture. My dad had a strong love of cats, which he obviously passed down to me.

My mom is allergic to animals, fur, to be specific. When she found out that my dad had yet *another* cat, she got very angry. She had continuous allergic reactions and the arguments between my dad and her increased. My mom wanted the cat gone, but my dad refused.

My dad and Jade grew an unbreakable bond. He loved to do work in his backyard and so he bought Jade a long green leash, so they could both be outside at the same time. They did everything together. Jade never hissed or scratched. She never knocked things off counters or scratched up the furniture. But she had a loud mouth, and constantly wanted attention.

And then, there came me. The farthest I can remember being with Jade is age five. I loved Jade so much, my sister did too. I did everything with her. Well, as much as a five-year-old could. There are handfuls upon handfuls of pictures of me with Jade, whether it's me sleeping next to her on the floor, trying to walk her in my backyard, us playing with milk carton caps (which she loved), me petting her, funny and cute pictures of her doing cat things, and even a photo of her perched on my chest as we watched movies. She was my favorite thing in the world, considering I was little and was closed off from the rest of society. My mom still hated having Jade around, but she knew that there were now three people ready to argue with her about it—my dad, my sister, and I. Despite my being young, I had a very wise mouth and used it quite often. That hasn't changed.

Every night, around 9:00, my bedtime, I would wander around my house in search of my beautiful black cat. Whenever I'd find her, I'd bend down and whisper in her ear, "Come and lay with me!" Expecting her to understand. I never slept with Jade before, at least, not in my bed, where I wanted her to be with me the most, since I spent most of my time there. I convinced myself she could understand me when I talked to her—which was constantly—but she just never wanted to respond to me. I was determined to have at least one night where she'd sleep in my bed with me.

I had Jade up until I was seven or eight. She was around twenty years old which is much older in cat years. Twenty years is an ab-

normally long lifespan for a cat. It was a weekend where my grandmother was babysitting me on my floor of the house; she lived upstairs. I was lying peacefully in my parents' bed, watching cartoons on TV. I held Jade beside me, petting her frequently in fear she'd eventually move away, which I did not want. I wanted every single animal I came across to love being around me, as much as I loved being around them, and at the time, I couldn't sense that from Jade, so I wanted to make it happen.

At one point, she'd had enough of my presence and she stood up. I desperately tried to whistle and call her to sit back down again, hoping that our time together would last a little longer. She was a cat, so she didn't understand these complex emotions my seven/eight-year-old-self was feeling. She eventually leapt down from the bed and hit the ground with a loud thump. It startled me a little. Had she hit something?

I watched her walk out of the room as if nothing happened. She looked fine, but something told me she wasn't. Perhaps it could have just been my anxiety, because when I got up, she was trotting around and playing with her milk carton caps like normal Jade. This relieved me and I dismissed my twisting, turning stomach and raging thoughts.

It wasn't until my dad got home that Jade acted unusually. She suddenly became slower. She didn't meow as much as she used to. At one point in the day, she collapsed onto the dining room floor. This triggered Jade's yowling that I can still remember to this day. She was in pain, but it was unclear what sort. My dad sat down beside her with a saucer filled with water. My mother, my sister, and my cousin all crowded around to see what was going on. As Jade continued to yowl, my dad dipped his fingers in the saucer and ran his finger tips up and down Jade's side. At this point, I was on the verge of bawling my eyes out. Jade was *dying*.

"Is she dying?" I asked anxiously. Although I already knew the answer, I refused to face reality.

My father simply lifted his head up at me with an unhappy look on his face. My mother and he exchanged a glance, one I didn't want to understand, before my father continued to dampen Jade's fur.

"Isabella, come with me to change your clothes," my mother said.

I now realize she was trying to get me away from Jade because she didn't want me to witness my beloved pet dying. As soon as my mother pulled me to my bedroom, I began to sob. As she started to change my clothes, I could barely find the words to say what I was thinking—would we get another cat? It was a selfish thing to ask, and an extremely selfish thing to think about. I still can't believe I could think about replacing Jade, right when she was suffering two rooms away from me.

“Everything will be okay. We'll get another cat, Isabella,” my mother promised. Even that didn't stop the immense pain I was feeling.

After that, everything was hard. I was so upset for days on end. Jade's body in rigor mortis. My dad set her on her tall cat tree. She was there for two to three days. Every day, at least twice, I would go over to her stiffened body and just pet her. I'd rub her pads—something she loved—and I would just stare at her face. Her mouth was open, her fangs out, and her eyes were wide. It was awful to see something I had grown to love so much, stiff as a board and lifeless. My dad eventually took her to get cremated, and put into a shiny heart-shaped box with her name beautifully written on it. This box now sits on a shelf in my dining room, a picture of her hung over it, and countless photographs of us beside it.

And still, I never got her to sleep in my bed.

© 2019 Isabella Jamuzzi

The Journey of a Musician

Nicole Faria

Music. The one thing that I have loved throughout my entire life. Ever since I was little, perhaps around the age of 6, music started to become a major passion of mine. It was always my special thing with which I was able to escape. No matter the situation, music was always there, helping me through every event in my life. This is my special thank-you note to the very thing that will keep me alive 'til my older days. Come with me as I explain to you why music is so precious to me.

Over the years, I slowly got the urge to be a musician myself and, in the 3rd grade, I finally got my first opportunity. I got to make my first decision of what kind of musician I wanted to be. Did I want to

be a violinist, cellist, violist or perhaps even a bassist? Of course, I chose the most generic option in the history of generic choices, to be a violinist. See, I wasn't like the other people who chose violin for no reason. Instead, I had a very specific reason why I wanted to be a violinist. I loved the energy of the violin; the E string sounded beautiful to me, and many of my inspirations played the violin, for example, Lindsey Stirling, Sean Mackin and many others. Over time I began to love other instruments as well, such as the ukulele, piano and even my own vocal chords.

My love for ukulele began to develop very quickly, especially after I discovered Grace VanderWaal in 4th grade. To my surprise, a couple months later, the daycare that I was working at began to have ukulele lessons. Of course, it was very beginner and even sometimes annoying, because of the little kids, but I got to experience my first connection with an instrument other than violin. That very connection led my aunt to buy me a ukulele so I could practice on my own time. I still remember my reaction when she presented the ukulele to me. I almost shed happy tears for crying out loud! As soon as I became more accustomed with the ukulele, I began to write my own songs with it, which was a very special experience. I am still working on my very first song, that I made with the ukulele a while back, to be fairly honest.

I'm trying to figure out what the lyrics for the song should be, which leads me to my next instrument to which I felt a connection: my very own, self-taught, vocal chords. I always had a connection with them but, ever since 5th grade, I had an even **bigger** connection. Back when I was 6, I used my vocal chords as a fun way to interact with my favorite songs. Now, I use my vocal chords in an even **larger** way. I use them to create new songs, sing along with my favorite artists, make duets with my friends and even to sing songs with other people.

Nevertheless, I wouldn't have continued with music if it weren't for my inspirations. Instead, I would've probably ended up hating music because of how hard it can be at times. **Panic! At The Disco**, Gabbie Hanna, Marcus Veltri and Jon Bellion have all helped me continue on with music and even learn to love it. I discovered **Panic! At The Disco** back when Musical.ly was still a major social media app, which was two years ago. I discovered them through their song "Victorious" and eventually began to search them up. To my sur-

prise, they were a very popular band that I had never heard about. I hadn't even listened to any of their songs before! After I spent 30 minutes searching them up, while listening to "Victorious," I discovered their major song, "I Write Sins Not Tragedies."

The moment I heard the first couple lyrics of "I Write Sins Not Tragedies," I immediately fell in love with the beautiful god known as Brendon Urie. His perfect jawline, his brown eyes that immediately draw me in and even his amazing vocal chords, that are very rare for male singers, he was perfect. Not only is his singing and appearance amazing, he is also the one who got me to love music and even stop myself from committing suicide.

I discovered Gabbie Hanna through her Youtube channel, *Gabbie Hanna*, which is more well known as *The Gabbie Show*. I first found her on my recommended list, on Youtube, in 4th grade. She had made a video on remaking cringey emo Musical.ly's which had gotten her some fame with many different communities. I was in one of those communities, the Musical.ly community. After I discovered that video and started to enjoy her videos, I searched her up on Musical.ly to see if she had any good content there. As expected, her content was beyond wonderful and could even be called amazing.

After that, I began to become a huge fan of hers and, over the years, even started to show her to my friends. As a result of this, when I first heard the news about her releasing a book and possibly a music video, I freaked out. I even put the release date on my calendar and made sure that I got the book on that day. I knew that this would be even more proof that Gabbie Hanna is a marvelous comedian and artist. When the music video came out, I was a bit shaken and very excited for it. I loved the sound and rhythm and even her vocals sounded outstanding.

Over time, I learned that my vocal chords are the same as hers so I began to practice singing with her songs. My all-time favorite to practice with, now, is definitely her song "Satellite." It is a very astounding song that I can easily relate to all the time. Gabbie Hanna has definitely taught me a lesson that if she can sing well and perform, then I can too.

This one might prove to be surprising as I explain to you how I found Marcus Veltri. So, I was browsing through Youtube and I came across this video called "Idiot Plays All Star On Piano for Five

Hours Straight.” I was very curious that day and had nothing planned so I clicked on the video and attempted to watch it. Amazingly, I started to really enjoy Marcus Veltri’s talent and even wanted to begin playing piano. There was a minor problem though, I had no piano in my house except for a broken keyboard. So, instead of give up, I began to watch more videos of Marcus Veltri and examined his talent. I observed how he did certain techniques on the piano and how he was able to focus on beatboxing while playing the piano. After my observations, I realized that to be a good musician means to practice whenever you can because practice makes perfect.

Now, you might be thinking that I have such an amazing life and nothing can bring me down. That, my friend, is semi-true and semi-untrue. Yes, I have a better life than many of those around me, but it is very unfair and false to assume that nothing brings me down. I have many times where I experience severe anxiety and even some severe depression, it’s what makes me human. Nobody is perfect and everybody has at least experienced depression or anxiety one time in their life. Instead of bring you down, I’m going to tell you what helps me to escape those unhappy times.

Music. Music has always helped me to escape any obstacle that life puts in front of me. My inspirations, that I mentioned above, are just some of the many people that make me feel happy again. **Panic! At The Disco** is one of the major ones that always helps me with I’m feeling sad. Just like I told you before, **Brendon Urie** was the very one who stopped me from committing suicide. The one reason I’m still alive. I don’t just fan-girl over him because I like him, he is one of the few people that have a major place in my heart. Without **Brendon**, I wouldn’t even be here right now. I know he probably isn’t going to read this, but, thank you so much **Brendon** for everything you have done. You will always be my number one inspiration in life.

Another reason I love music so much is because it’s my “special language.” Music always has a way to reach the hearts of others no matter what language they speak, their native country, or their culture. Music connects us all together and has a very special role in the human race, especially in our time. If music were a person, I would owe them big time for helping me cope with every trial in my life. So, to end this off, I am going to thank music for everything.

Thank you so much, music, for helping me in life and stopping me from committing suicide. If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be here writing a thank you note to you. Instead, I would probably already be underground at a graveyard. You have helped me connect with other people, find inspirations, and even make my very own music for others to admire. You are always going to be that one special thing that I will hold onto with my heart, forever. Thank you.

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Cancer

Phoebe Milhous

“Ring...Ring...Ring...” That was mom’s phone, I answered.

“Hello?” It was my sister, Chloe.

“Hey, can I talk to Mom? It's really important.” I stood and brought the phone to my Mom. She was sitting at the kitchen table working on her school’s finances and budgets. I handed her the phone.

“It’s Chloe,” I whispered.

“Hey Chloe!” Mom got serious. “Oh, really?”

Mom told me to go do my homework. I left and started to work on my math, but I started to think, *what was so serious? What happened? What was going on? I didn't understand, but I wanted to know.*

I walked back into Mom’s room and stood there. Mom always had a loud phone, especially when she was on a call. She just never decreased her volume.

I listened, standing in the doorway. She saw me, but didn't tell me to leave. Chloe was talking about getting surgery, but for what? All these questions were popping into my head. *I wanted to know what had happened. What was going on?* I gave up on trying to figure it out. If it were truly bad, mom would tell me later.

I went back to doing my math, but I was still distracted. I ended up watching some videos on YouTube.

A few days passed and I heard nothing about the call. There was nothing for another three days after that, too. Finally, Mom came into my room and asked how I was doing. I answered with a grunt as usual. She sat on my bed, looked at the floor and revealed, “Your sister has thyroid cancer.”

The silence that followed pierced my ears, the conversation was swallowed by sorrow and fear.

I looked up from my phone, turned around and stared at her, “What?” Fear ran down my spine, and thoughts corrupted my mind about my sister.

Cancer? Am I going to *lose* my best friend and my *only* sister?

As days passed I learned more about what kind of cancer my sister had. It was curable and easy to get rid of. I felt a bit more at ease, but even so when I went back to school, I was extremely depressed. I was still petrified that she might get hurt, something might happen to her and she could die!

At school, I would try to hide my emotions from everyone, especially Mr. Stephano. He could sniff out any emotion of sadness or depression in an instant if you weren’t careful. Even if you were careful, he could probably find out what you’re thinking anyways.

Days passed quickly, and my sister’s surgery was closing in. I had a choice, going to school or come with my parents to the hospital to wait for my sister. I couldn’t stand hospitals, and I couldn’t stand to wait with nothing to do but wander in my own mind, so I chose to stay at school.

I hid all my emotions from everyone, but I was *slowly* caving.

It was after my second class, math with Mr. Stephano that I broke. I was meeting my friends at the normal spot for specialists. I was talking to my friends, but I was super depressed. They noticed. They asked me what was wrong.

“It’s nothing,” I claimed, but they were not buying it, not at all. They persisted and asked, but I didn’t want to cave, not when there were so many people and especially not with Mr. Stephano in the room. I gave in, but I tried *so hard* not to cry. Once I started talking, the tears came up to my eyes. I tried to suppress them, but it was no use. I started crying softly so no one would hear, but people *saw* me. They crowded around me, grabbed the attention of Mr. Stephano. They all asked if I was all right, and what happened, but they didn’t really care. No one really did. They all just wanted to seem like nice people, and yes there are some people who are actually nice and do care a bit, but no one cared that much.

I just wanted to be alone, by myself, crying until there were no tears left, but that is not how the world works.

“Everyone back away!” Mr. Stephano screamed.

This was the one thing I didn't want to happen, especially *that* day of all days. I was still crying when he took me to sit down. He sat next to me and asked me about why I was crying. I didn't want to tell him, or really anyone for that matter. He insisted. I was embarrassed, I felt like I could crawl up into a ball and stay there forever.

I finally caved, and I was still bawling while I told him, but the message came through either way. I didn't want to see or talk to anyone, all I wanted to do was hide all alone until my friends came and comforted me. That's not what happened.

Pity, that's all that I got. Petty pity. That was one of the things I least wanted in that moment. I didn't want to have people looking down on me when they have no idea what's going on, I didn't want their sympathy.

The day ended quickly after that, I got picked up and acted like nothing had happened. My parents didn't know, and never would. I hid my feelings and acted like I was fine. Until the day I was *finally* going to see my sister since the surgery.

Chloe's boyfriend, Will, was at the hospital with her waiting for my parents and me to come.

I was unwilling, not because I didn't want to see her, but because I am, and always will be terrified of hospitals, doctors, and *especially* needles. Whenever I think about any of those things, my whole body tingles and I get nervous, nauseous, and light headed.

I grudgingly got into the car, thinking we would only be there for an hour or so.

As soon as I saw the hospital, a shiver went down my spine and I started to get nauseous. It went away as soon as we parked and I got out into the fresh air, but I could still feel it in the bottom of my stomach.

As we entered, I felt it intensify a bit; I tried to continue walking but the feeling was overwhelming. As we got to my sister's hospital room, we saw Will and her talking. Will spotted us, got up and told us to come in and find a chair. I first hugged my sister. The feeling of losing her was almost nonexistent.

Will's parents came late and we all had a meal that Will had as a kid. There was beef with roasted peppers on a bun.

Everyone else talked and I talked a bit too but I didn't feel like talking a lot, not at the time. I just played a game or watched something on my phone for most of the three hours we were there.

When time was up we hugged, said goodbye and left. The feeling of nausea was still there but at least my sister and my family were fine.

In the end my sister had to go back to the doctor and hospital multiple times because of some “complication” but my sister is doing great and the complication was dealt with. My sister couldn’t create enough calcium and other proteins. She had to start taking tums and other kinds of substitutes.

My sister and I are doing awesome; everything is almost back the way it was. The only thing that still reminds me of that time in my life is the scar on my sister’s throat. They are painful memories but if I were to forget this ever happened then I don’t think that I would be the person I am today.

This happened over the course of five months, and I have gotten closer to my soon to be stepmother whom I adore. My life has been a mess, and it still feels that way. But I’ll move on like I have been, and help as much as I can. And I’ll keep moving forward.

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transitions

All A Lie

Nehemie Simon

All my life I have been lied to and fooled. I was the only child, and I thought my mother had passed away. But the truth was that she had left me when I was a baby. My whole life was just a lie. I grew up with no mother and no one to play with. I was so lonely, and I thought I would never be normal. But I was wrong. When I found out the truth I was determined to find my mother. I did research; I even asked my father, but he would only respond with, “You’re not ready to know yet.” I was starting to think I was adopted. I was so angry. I grew up without a mother figure and missed out on what normal kids would do.

I finally found my real mother after I did some more research and found out she was sent to a prison in California. Her bail was set at \$10,000. That wasn’t out of my family’s ability to afford, which made me more suspicious of why my own father would leave her there. So I asked my dad, and my dad said I had to work to raise the

money, and I got really upset. I started to wonder what she had done, why she was in jail.

I asked my dad again, and he still said, “You’re still not ready.” I was so determined to find out. I thought my father should tell me. It must be really, really bad for him not to tell me the truth. I kept having strange dreams about my mother. I found out she was a freak and that she tried to kill me. But my dad stood up for me. I told my dad, “We have to talk now.” I found out she was kept in a prison in California.

I started to detect this for a long time. I had more of a suspicion when I asked my dad and he wouldn’t tell me about my mom. My heart was broken. I wanted to meet my mom, but at the same time I didn’t because I was scared. I was in such grief. I was trying to distance myself from all this research, but I could not do it. I was dedicated to finding out the truth. My heart was beating, what if she is going to try to kill me again? I’m going to see her next week on Tuesday.

It’s Tuesday, March 19, 2021. I’m at the prison facility speaking to my mom behind a glass wall. I couldn’t even say anything but, “Why?”

It looked so hideous; it was terrible. We finally got the money to bail my mother out, but I couldn’t decide if I should do it or not. We bailed her out, but she is on probation and house arrest. Any little thing she does could send her back to jail. Her heart was beating so fast because she was scared of what I would think of her. Would I like her or not?

But I was being petty for a month. Then I got over it, and we were like a normal family. She told me the entire story, and she said that she got set up so justice will be served.

© 2019 Nehemie Simon

Friendship

Ashley Portillo

Why did I trust you? I thought we would be best friends for life. You telling me I was #1. I thought everything was fine. Days later a girl shows up and I’m left out. I just cry, thinking I’m not good for our friendship. I cry and cry. You ask why I’m mad, you thinking I’m crazy for being mean to you. Then I start to hang out with someone new, and you think it’s their fault we aren’t best friends

anymore. But no, I start to defend her and say it all—the truth—that it’s your fault; and I tell you everything. The only thing you say is sorry and that you didn’t know. Well I don’t care anymore. You do your life, and I will do mine. I won’t cry anymore. I don’t think it’s my fault. It wasn’t me, but it wasn’t you. It was us not having things in common anymore, and that’s okay because there are people like us. You found yours, and I found mine. We can still be friends, but I don’t think we’ll ever be the same. And now I know it wasn’t my fault. It wasn’t me, I’m not a bad friend or stupid. I shouldn’t cry and I shouldn’t be mad. It’s normal to change, and that’s okay.

© 2019 Ashley Portillo

The Tell-tale Heart continued

Zackary Weissman-Bennett

It has been a month since I have been visiting this man. He is truly insane. Each day I come back to counsel him, and yet still his reasons for murder are not valid. Each day he raves on and on about the eye and how it vexed him. Who would kill someone because of his eye? The old man was his father, his boss. It seemed like he truly loved him... except for the eye. The old man had no suspicion of this man for he had sugar coated it. Then he was wary about not gathering any suspicion before killing the old man. His story still seemed a bit off. For when he went crazy and turned himself in, he said the police had no suspicion even though he was screaming, cursing and throwing his furniture.

He has told me the story ten times now and it is all completely mad. How crazed he was with killing the man is insane. And he is kept in a straitjacket to be kept calm.

But day by day I have detected a slow improvement, for the old man’s eye is gone. He has even mourned the old man’s death for he only hated the eye, not the old man. But one day I noticed something very strange while visiting him. I could not tell what it was but one day it arose in my head. That’s it, I thought, his patience is way lower. If I speak for only a minute or so, he starts to curse under his breath. What was I to think, had his jail time gotten to him? His trial would be in a month’s time, and he was being condemned to death. I would be his defender. But this man could not protect himself for he was mad. Maybe I could get him into a mental hospital at best.

But a day later I walked in and they told me the man had died... of a heart attack. Why, I questioned? He had seemed fine only the day before and was only a young man. Could the change of patience have been a sign, or was the strain of killing someone too much for him? But then again he was crazy. A crazy ending for a truly insane man. In the end the heart that turned him in was also the one that killed him.

The end

© 2019 Zackary Weissman-Bennett

Past

Douglas Perez

Remembering what happened last
It all just happened so fast
All everyone could say
Was that everything would be okay
It was obvious I was being led astray
I just felt so betrayed
Even if it was for the best
I felt such stress
I couldn't rest
All that remains
Is pain
Like a dirty stain
We finally got the call
Felt my world fall
I couldn't believe that something that seemed so small
Can be the end of it all.

© 2019 Douglas Perez

A GG Poem

Yasmin Nazhar

My dog is a Corgi,*
He likes to jump when he sees me,
He is cute and chubby,
He is GG!

He loves his squeaky toys,
At night time he always plays,
And sometimes it's comforting,
But other times annoying,
But that's OK!

He is fuzzy and furry,
Silly and kinda heavy,
GG is special to me,
And that really makes me happy!

* A Pembroke Welsh Corgi to be exact.

© 2019 Yasmin Nazhar

Expectations

Nicole Lopez

I run,
I run until I can't.
Even though I can't see through my held back tears,
I can tell I'm far away from the disappointed crowd.
I drop to my knees and let everything out,
Looking down on me he says,
"It's okay, next time you can try harder."
I look down at my knees ashamed and say,
"You don't understand, I really did try my hardest this time."

© 2019 Nicole Lopez

I too, sing America

Evelyn Flores

The song so foreign yet so familiar
The words flow like a river
I remember them easily
Each syllable rolling off my tongue
With ease
Leaving a bittersweet taste in my mouth
And I can't help but wonder, was I stealing the words?

The tongue was one I knew
But made me forget who I was
The richness, the description, the power the language gives me
The power to write, freely
And yet I feel like I was shackled, like there is something holding
me back
And yet I think the delicate language, so harsh
So much history to unravel

It was a language that made some people feel superior
And made other people feel inferior
Made them feel like they were stealing something
But this language so bittersweet
Is not meant to fill up people's egos
It is not meant for anything but communicating

America, a place where potential is born and dies
Where dreams are destroyed or lived

America the great, unfinished symphony
Built on rules, because of frustration
The story intertwined with so many cultures
Yet I still sing America with conviction in my voice
Because even though it's unfair and flawed
It is America, the fighter,
Singing because even though my skin, my hair and eyes
Don't look like America
I am as America as anyone

© 2019 Evelyn Flores

An Ode to Hershey's Chocolate

Sakshi Hastir

Hershey's Chocolate you melt in my mouth
 You taste like a lot of sugar
 So sweet and sugary
There is never a day I don't think about you
 I will never forget you
 Nor will I ever stop eating you
 You are too good for that
 Oh sweet Hershey's Chocolate
You melt in my hand and on my forehead
 I don't even know how it gets there
 But it doesn't matter
 Because I will eat every last bit of you
 Until there is nothing left
 Except the smudge on my forehead
 And I'll never know how it got there
I don't want to share you with my brother
 But he will never stop annoying me
 Until I give him a piece
 Of your sweet, delicious, chocolate
You would taste good with a lot of things
 Well, not vegetables
 I think that would taste pretty bad
But you would taste good with a lot of other things though,
 Like fruit and other types of candy
 Milk and ice cream too
But no type of food can be as great,
 As you, Hershey's Chocolate
 The best chocolate in the world

© 2019 Sakshi Hastir

The Weakest of Them All

Mohammed S. Miahjee

I lived in the most populated city in the country, called “Valestia.” My sister’s existence vanished from the world after the awakenings when I was fifteen. My parents died in a C rank dungeon when I was twenty. When they arrived in the boss room. The boss was detected as an S rank boss that was somehow in a C rank dungeon. Those dungeons are called re-opened dungeons. If someone were ever to beat those types of dungeons, they can obtain a remastered power. But it doesn’t mean they will get a stronger power. Some people called this a re-awakened dungeon. People much prefer not to take on these dungeons because it takes 1000 C rank adventurers to take down one S rank monster, let alone a boss! I came across one of those re-awakened dungeons, but this was different...

I joined a C-rank party to help me take on a D-rank dungeon. As the useless E rank adventurer I was, I couldn’t help them in a fight. I had no power after my awakening. The only thing I had that was different from a normal human was abnormal human strength. But I was still far too weak for even E-rank monsters.

A C-ranker with two red flame-looking swords on his back, and with a diamond-embled silver shield, with hefty silver armor, walked up to me.

“What’s your name Sir, E ranker?”

“Jackson Jones. You can call me Jack. I’m not v-very strong but I’ll try my b-best to help,” I stuttered.

“It’s all right. I’m the party leader. My name is Havick. Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you, Havick.”

Havick walked in front of the party members and explained our plan. “We have two D rank Healers and one C rank Healer. We’re gonna need them to sit back with Jack over there. He’ll be holding our bags with materials and mana potions if needed. I will be front line and resist the boss. We’re gonna need the two mages to sit in

the middle and shoot fire type magic. The boss was detected as heat for its weakness.”

We opened the large rock doors of the dungeon. We were brought to a cave that had three tunnels at the entrance. The walls were maroon and had a rocky surface. It was as if we were in an ant hole. We expected to encounter insect type monsters. So it wasn't much of a surprise to us. The party split up to groups to find the entrance to the boss room. I was with Havick and one of the D rank healers, Michael. We started walking into the middle tunnel.

As we walked through the dungeon we came across large, red beetles. There were too many to count. Havick took out his shield and called to his power, “TANKING SPIKES!” His shield came shooting out with diamond, shriveled spikes with a blue lightning aura. His swords shot out his back. The tips of the blades shot up aiming at the horde of beetles. He raised his hand, and large, dark blue spheres formed at the tips of his swords. He closed a fist and the spheres released massive beams and killed more than half the horde! He held his arm up with his shield, and ran through the rest, electrocuting them.

“Havick, how did you get such a power as that and only be ranked C?” I exclaimed.

“Trust me... B to S ranker powers are far more powerful than mine. Mine might have more effects, but it isn't even close to those even one rank above me.”

The beetles were fried with a black crust on the shell of their bodies. Their blue blood dripped onto the the cave floor. It smelled like sour Jolly Ranchers mixed with human flesh. The healer spread an aroma that smelled like perfume to kill any microorganisms that were flying in the air.

After a bit of walking, we came to a dead end. We walked back and we saw the other two groups waiting for us. Apparently they already found the boss room.

“The boss room is to the left. Just follow us.”

We started to walk through the tunnel. The farther we got into the tunnel, the more it expanded. After about a few minutes or so, we came to a stop. There was a massive hobbit door, outlined with

silver metal. It seemed like it was a door for Titans or Giants. But, why was it in an insect dungeon? The other party members were also suspicious of this, but none of us thought much about it.

Havick put everyone in position. “Strikers come here. You guys are going to help me open the door.” Havick and the two Strikers pushed the door just slightly and the door slammed open on its own. We saw a statue that was grey with magic marks all around it. It had a crown, long hair, and a grey diamond on its forehead. It was sitting on a chair and its long fingers were hanging off the handles of the chair. There were smaller statues surrounding it. Six had instruments, one with a harp, one with a violin, one with a trombone. The other three had giant swords and held them from the handle and the tip of the sword on the ground. There were two statues standing beside the door to the boss room, one with a gigantic axe, and the other with a gigantic two-hand sword. They were protected with heavy armor and had torches in their eyes.

The two Strikers backed up into formation and Havick started to slowly walk towards the statue in the center. We followed slowly behind him. I felt a tingling behind my back as if someone were watching me, and suddenly--*SLAM!* The door shut and we all turned around. Everyone started to freak out.

“STAY CALM! Everyone run towards the side!” We all ran behind him and saw a wall with a set of rules on them.

But before we could read them one of the strikers stuttered, “M-maybe I can u-use m-my s-s-speed skill to run out f-f-fast en-n-nough...”

“DON’T!” Havick yelled.

But he had already charged his speed and muttered under his breath, “I’m sorry...” He pushed one foot forward and the second he raised his body, *ZAP!* His whole torso disintegrated. His legs dropped to the ground and blood fled out his legs. The giant statue shot a beam through its diamond the second he stood up. The Party members started to freak out and one of the healers stood... *ZAP!* His whole body... vanished in a blink of an eye.

“Everyone calm down! Let’s first figure out why he killed them and not us. It might be what it says on this wall.”

The wall stated:

Those who truly believe in god will pray to them.
Those who truly believe in god will praise them.
Those who truly believe in god will sacrifice for them.

It took me a second to realize, but the only time that statue shot at one of us was when they stood.

“Everyone! Don’t stand up. You will die if you stand up. The wall says ‘Those who truly believe in god will pray to them’ It means that the statue is the God and we have to pray to it. Meaning we have to bow down to it.”

The party members didn’t seem to believe me. I guessed I was considered “too weak” to be heard of.

But then Havick commanded, “Everyone, this is an order! Bow down to the statue!” Everyone started to bow down and the statue looked forward.

I raised my head to see if the statue stopped moving. The statue’s eyes looked to me and made a big evil smile. Its eyes were filled with blood lust. Its mouth showed its dark burnt gums with its white sharp teeth. It raised its right hand toward the door and the statues guarding the door pulled back their weapons and the door opened. Everyone looked to the door... then to the statue. We all jumped up and started to have a small celebration, but something seemed wrong. Why did the statue’s smile look so... devilish?

The Striker yelled, “We can escape! Yes!” As he walked towards the door the large statue eyes followed the Striker, and its smile got bigger as he got closer to the door.

“DON’T! IT’S A TRA—!” Before I could finish my sentence the Striker looked back... *SLAM!* The two statues guarding the door swung their swords down on him. His body fell on the ground into four pieces. His organs spilled out of his body... It was horrific.

We all stood there with despair in our eyes. The large statue started to laugh but with no sound. Its head just moved up and down, his large smile just laughed at the Striker’s dead body.

“How did you know it was a trap?” Havick asked.

“The wall stated ‘If you truly believe in god you will praise them.’ Which meant even if you have the option to leave god behind, you will continue to praise god either way.”

“Hmm, you may be weak but you’re smart for an adventurer.”

“Thank you,” I offered.

“Now let’s find the next clue and get out of here.”

The large statue turned his hand in front of him in a fist, then opened it and behind us a large cylinder shaped platform with marks all over it rose up. Inside that circle a smaller rectangular prism rose. Havick walked on it and one flame appeared. Then the rest of us followed and another three appeared. The statues with blades brought their swords up from the ground and slowly started walking towards us.

The second they started walking towards us, one of the healers screamed, and sped through the door. One flame disappeared and the statues started walking slower. We all looked away from the statues and they started to walk slower.

“Don’t look at the statues around us! The more you look at them the faster they get!” I commanded.

After thirty seconds or so, another flame disappeared but the rest of us were still in the circle. The statues were only about three meters away from us and we had three flames left.

“Havick... I want you to take the last Healer with you and leave. I’ll keep these statues off with the last flame holding,” I lamented.

“Why? We might be able to survi—”

“Remember the last line? ‘Those who truly believe god will sacrifice for them.’ I’ll be the sacrifice,” I sighed.

“I-I can’t... You helped us more than we helped you... I’ll stay,” he stammered

“No, I’m the weakest adventurer and I don’t have a family anymore. I won’t lose as much as you will. I’m not worth it. Please... I was prepared to die anyways.”

“Okay... I understand.” He looked at the healer with a tear falling down his eye. “C’mon we gotta go. We only have a few minutes left,” he sobbed. He and the Healer dashed under the statue’s leg and ran out of the room.

I walked to the rectangular prism and laid my body there. My last flame started to disappear. But, right before it could completely disappear, one of the statues slammed its foot on the flame... I made a smirk and a tear dripped down my cheek.

Right before I died, I said my last words, "This was meant to be." I heard the sound of my ribs crack and my heart stopped beating... My eyes went blank.

"Welcome to the system. You have died."

"What?" I questioned. Everything was black, but I could see a holograph in front of my face.

"The re-awakening only enables until you have defeated the boss, but your previous awakening was resurrection. You will be resurrected after your awakening, but first we need your permission. Would you like to have another chance to live? With a stronger power? Something to live for? Press accept to continue dialogue." This is my awakening? I get another chance?

"I accept!" Everything went black and I went unconscious.

I woke up three days later in the hospital. Havick and one of the Healers were sitting next to me.

"You're up!" Havick exclaimed.

"Yeah, somehow I survived that."

"Yeah, we sent in back up, but apparently by the time they got there you were lying on the ground. There was no statue... nothing. Just you lying there on the ground."

"Huh... At least we survi--" My whole body stopped working and the hologram popped up again.

"Welcome back." A bunch of information that said Level, Strength, Intellect, Agility, Defense, Health. There was one part that said "Side Skill: Unknown."

"These are your stats. You can increase them through your daily quests and by killing monsters."

"How many stats do I get on a daily quest?"

"You can get up to three stat points and 500 EXP for daily quests. Every level gives five points to each stat. Obtaining certain items can increase these stats like weapons, armor, and potions. Depending on the monster's rank, it will give more or less exp. You can start training in this secret gate key to a training dungeon."

"Ok... Looks like it's time to get working. Isn't it?" I gushed.

"Good luck, Jackson Jones. You're going to need it."

I woke back up and jumped off my bed. “Where are you going, Mr. Jones?” Havick asked.

“I gotta go do something!” I said as I ran.

I pulled up my sleeves and muttered with a smirk, “This is when the real adventure starts...” © 2019 Mohammed S. Mialjee

Justice

Shreeva Pyakurel

She was the perfect sister. She would come home from work late at night always with food for me. “Your favorite,” she would say in a happy tone. She knew how much I loved fast food. Well, there would be no more of that.

* * *

I didn’t think that I was coping with my sister’s death the way I should have been. My mother had been barging into my room crying everyday since the incident. It had been a *great* seven days. No, but seriously, normal people would have been crying like my mother and grieving, but me? No. All I wanted to do was to find out who did it and make them pay. I wanted them to get justice for the wrong that they had committed. No, the sin they had committed.

My boyfriend, Elijah, had been calling me nonstop every morning for the past week. I saw about nine missed calls from him each day. I wanted to answer and tell him how angry I was for whoever did this, but I knew that he would tell me to take a break and be normal.

We were known as the most generous and loving family in Crofton. I wondered how people were reacting to the situation. I didn’t comprehend why someone would want to hurt one of us. Were they jealous? Did we do something?

Elijah had called again. This time I picked up. I didn’t want him coming to the scene of the crime. I could barely be there myself.

Our call didn’t last as long as I thought it would have. All he said was that I should stay put and that he was coming to get me to take me somewhere. He knew that I couldn’t deal with emotional pain. What I loved about him was that he would try to help me as much as he could.

Ding dong! I rushed downstairs and opened the door to see Elijah standing with flowers. As soon as I saw him, I began to cry. Something about him made me feel normal enough to shed tears. He quickly came inside and hugged me.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“I missed you so much. I wanted to call you, I swear, but I just knew that you would be the one to break me.” At that moment, all the emotions were flooding in.

He took me to my room so that I could change. I put the flowers down. When I asked him about where we were going, he started to smile.

“Hmm, somewhere,” he said in a mysterious voice. “Trust me, you’ll like it.”

All the pain and sadness had gone away at this point. All I felt was happiness and love and maybe a hint of crazy.

“You know how I love investigations, right?” I could tell that Elijah knew where this was heading by the look on his face. “Well I was thinking, what if we try to find the murderer? It will give me some peace knowing that an awful person has been turned in.” Surprisingly, he didn’t try to convince me otherwise.

“I think that it might be hard and there will be challenges, but if you think it will help you, then I’m all yours.” After he ended his sentence, I immediately jumped on top of him and hugged him. “I love you,” he whispered super softly. For a moment I hesitated. He had never said that to me before. I loved his dark brown, curly hair, and his hazel colored eyes. Also, he was super tall compared to me, but actually loving him? I didn’t know what to say or how to respond. I think that he caught on or realized because not long after, he told me to change quickly because we were late to where we were going.

Elijah helped me up onto his G-Wagon. I always had trouble to get on since it was really high and I was tiny. It feels as if you skip two stairs while you walk up.

The tension in the car was quite noticeable. To break the awkward silence, I asked, “Are we near the destination?”

After a second of processing the question, he responded saying, “Yeah, we are close. Maybe about five more minutes.”

All of the sudden I caught a glance of a shady man with a black hood. “Wait, wait stop here.”

“Why? We are almost there.” He sounded upset. I had to stop though. I remembered the security camera at my house caught a glimpse of my sister’s murderer. They were wearing a black hoodie and their body structure was very square and muscular.

As he started to pull over, they began to walk away. “Elijah, Elijah! Follow that person.” I felt bad for Elijah since he was trying to do something nice for me and I was messing it up, but I had to. This may have been the person who had committed the terrible offense.

“Mercuri Walker! We are definitely going to be late if we have a pit stop.”

“Elijah, I think that may be my sister’s killer.” I could tell that Elijah was shaken because his dark brown eyebrows formed the shape of a mountain. He tended to do that when he is surprised or shocked.

Without saying any words, we started to trail after them. I think they knew something or someone was following them because they suddenly started to walk faster.

Elijah sped up. They began to walk slower again until they stopped completely.

We stopped moving and pulled up next to the edge of a curb. The hooded figure turned into an alley in which I believe goes into a underground abandoned bar.

“How are we supposed to track them now,” he asked. I knew this was a unsafe plan, and that Elijah would completely disagree with me on this, but I knew that it was the only way.

“I’ll go.”

Not even seconds later, Eli shouted, “Are you *crazy!* You could get killed and end up right next to your sister!”

“I have to. It is the only approach.” It took a while, but I finally convinced him to let me go.

“I’ll be waiting right outside if you need me. All you have to do is yell and I’ll be there. Okay?” I knew that this was wasting my time and that they could have been long gone by now.

I replied with a simple okay, and kissed his cheek. The words I love you came out of my mouth as I was stepping out of the vehicle. I wasn’t sure if I said it because I was about to die or if I actually meant it. As I closed the car’s heavy bulky door, I heard the words *you too* come out faintly.

I followed where the figure went. The alley was dark and gloomy. It had a negative aura.

As I walked down the broken steps that led underground, I saw something. Something far, but close enough to see. Something that looked like a crime wall. It looked as if they were planning their next victim.

Right in the middle, a picture of me. *I* was the next victim.

I took my phone out and I zoomed into the wall. I took a picture and sent it to Elijah. He responded to me saying that I should get out before I get hurt. If I left, I might get hurt anyways. I texted him back saying not yet with an ellipsis.

I went closer to the crime wall to get a better angle at it. As I was moving closer, the old wooden floorboard creaked. I tried hiding behind one of the bar tables, but the figure had seen me. They reached into their hoodie's pocket and pulled out something that looked like a gun. As they pulled it out, I could see everything move in slow motion.

Bang...clink,clink. I saw the peanut shaped bullet slowly come right at my chest. I saw it gliding in the air. I wanted to move out of the way, but I couldn't.

That's when I felt someone's hands push me down and jump in front of me. It was the police.

I thought that the policeman had died in my hands. Luckily he were wearing Kevlar and was perfectly fine.

When I glanced up, I saw the murderer getting put into handcuffs. The policeman had them pinned up against the wall. When they had turned around, I saw who it was. It was my neighbor!

I looked up to see Elijah looking over me.

"Mercuri! I thought I told you to yell when you were in trouble." I tried to tell him that there was no time for me to pull out my phone or yell his name because there was already a gun pointed at me and if I made any noise or movement, I probably would have died, but the words didn't come out. I'm pretty sure he understood though because next thing I knew, he was holding me in his arms.

The police asked me if I needed a drive home but Eli had already offered to take me there himself.

As we were driving I said, "Hey Elijah?" My voice seemed very peppy considering I had almost just died. "Umm, how did the police come?"

“After the text you sent me saying you were determined to stay there, I assumed that your clumsy self was going to get hurt, so I called backup just in case, and I’m glad I did.”

After almost getting killed, I was glad to be able to laugh with him again.

When we approached my driveway, I invited Elijah in to sit with me and talk for a while.

“Will you come to my room and stay with me? I don’t want to be alone after what just happened.” Eli nodded his head yes.

We walked to my room slowly. As we both sat on my bed, I curled up next to him and said, “I think my days of investigating are over.” Elijah seemed surprised.

“You’re really going to give up your passion because of what happened today?”

“I mean don’t get me wrong, I’ll still meddle in cases and find out important information, but just not like the way I used to. It’s too dangerous. Like today, if you hadn’t called the police, I would have been dead.”

“You have a point there, Mercuri Walker. Just promise me that you won’t completely stop. Investigating and solving crimes is what you’re known for. You found the person who killed your sister before the police. You’re amazing!”

“Don’t worry, I won’t. All that’s left to ask is, why would my neighbor do it?” I had been thinking about this question since I saw his face. My neighbor was a very polite man in his late thirties who loved giving my family cookies. We would even invite him over to our family gatherings.

“I don’t actually know. Maybe he was jealous of the perfect family you have? Maybe it was just too much for him to look at you guys and smile that he just wanted to get rid of all of you? Don’t think about it much, though. Stuff like that will haunt you.”

“I won’t. No need to think about it. Justice had been served.”

* * *

I have still been sad ’til today. I missed my sister very much. May she rest in peace knowing her murderer has been turned in.

© 2019 Shreeva Pyakurel

The Target

Michaela Edwards

*Hey.
I'm Sahara.
And I'm going to tell my story.*

First let me start off with an introduction of myself. My name is Sahara Williams and I believe that I am currently fifteen years old. However, for the past several years, birthdays have become far from significant in our lives. As far as I am aware the year is 3020, which many are calling the “Year of Death.” I’ll give a little bit of background, but I would rather not bore myself with the details, as I had to live through it once already. There is a war. A world war. However, it is unlike many of the wars that have taken place in the past. The issue is that this war has been going on for so many years and generations, that very few people involved have a clue what they are fighting for. All that these countries know is that they want to win. And that it is a fight to the death.

In my early years I used to attend school. We learned about countless topics including the different countries in the world. And every single country that I had learned about is involved in this battle. However there are no allies, no partnerships. Only enemies.

Many countries have tried various methods to declare victory including my own, the United States. For many years now we have been hearing the same repetitive messages from our government over the news, about how, “We are doing the best for our country!” and “We will prevail!” However, I have recently discovered the truth. I have found the real way that our country has been rising up in power. The reason the population is decreasing. The reason there have been countless records of missing persons in the last decade. The reason that all of our government’s documents are highly confidential. And the reason that I haven’t seen my brother in over a year. I have found the real reason that our country is stronger than ever. And that is the reason that I am running.

I have been trying to escape for several months now with my twin siblings Sofi and Jaxon who are both around eight years old. They

are endlessly bratty, and annoying, and whiny. But I'm stuck with them and as the quote goes, "There is strength in numbers." And I guess that I love them a little, so I keep them around. Unfortunately, I didn't do so well in keeping my other sibling Isaac around. Over a year ago he was reported missing in the local paper. A week later there was an alleged sighting of his body, seemingly having been hung by himself in the forest. The moment when I read those words in the faded ink of the Sunday paper, I knew that something was amiss. I knew that these couldn't be true happenings, because I knew my brother. We were closer than anybody else in the family, and I knew that he was the happiest kid in the entire world. He would never do something of this sort. At the time that his missing report was released over a year ago he was thirteen years old. He would now be fourteen if he were still here. I knew that Isaac didn't commit suicide, which may have been a comforting thought at the time. The thought that maybe it was all a mistake. But now I know that if he became involved in what I have found out about, there is no doubt that he is dead.

* * *

I'm sure that this is all a bit confusing. And I'm sure this is not making much sense. So I will go back to the month after Isaac went missing. The day that I found my discovery.

It was my first day back at school after Isaac's supposed death. I could have stayed at home for much longer, as my parents had been fighting overseas in the war for years, and there was nobody at home forcing me to go. They were most likely dead, but having no parents wasn't an uncommon occurrence for most kids. Over three quarters of kids were living without their parents in my small town in Texas, so I never felt too sorry for myself.

I decided to go back because I just had to get out of the house. The sight of his door, with his name spelled out in rainbow wooden blocks, was too much for me. Although I was of course sad at the loss of my brother, it was hard to mourn when I knew that something was undoubtedly out of place.

I went through each of my classes, trying to glance away from all of the sympathetic and demeaningly pitiful stares I was receiving from my teachers and classmates. Most of the information that my teachers droned on about went in one ear and out the other. But I guess that wasn't really a newfound occurrence.

When the six hour day was finally over I began my repetitive walk home, just like I had been doing throughout my whole career as a student. Except this time my face was impassive, with my eyes glazed over as they had been since I had found out about Isaac. As I walked along I tried thinking about what may have happened, and if there was any chance that it was all a mistake. A misunderstanding. Maybe he was walking across the side of the creek like he loved to do, and accidentally fell in. Or maybe he got lost exploring in the forest. Whatever the alternative was, the story that they gave us just didn't add up. They never let us see his body, the person who was said to have found him hanging chose to remain anonymous, and I knew there was no way my brother would commit suicide.

I stepped through the gate of Madison Park, a public park in my town. At the end of a school day it was usually crowded with students as it was a common cut through for many people's walk home. However, as distracted as I was, I noticed that it was close to empty.

Suddenly I heard shouting in the distance, the voices seeming to approach quickly.

"Hey! You get back here!" a man shouted.

"You know what we're capable of young lady!" another man yelled. As he said this I heard the clinking of metal as a gun seemed to be getting loaded, the magazine swiftly clicking into place.

I totally freaked. My hands began sweating, and my heart was pumping out of my chest. I heard feet stomping towards me, and yet I couldn't seem to move my own. I was frozen in place. I couldn't think, I couldn't move, I couldn't do anything.

I stood trembling trying to figure out what was going on. I heard the gate smash open and I saw a girl around my age sprint in, out of breath. She was covered in dirt and looked like she hadn't rested in several days. Not far behind her were the two men both armed with handguns. They had dark hoodies pulled over their heads, concealing most of their features.

"Sahara!" the girl shakily screamed. "Sahara Williams!"

I turned. I had never seen this girl before in my life. How could she have known my name? She rushed over to me.

"My name is Maddy," she told me. "I need you to take this."

She swiftly slipped a beat-up journal into my school bag. Although I didn't make a sound, she could tell that I was confused.

“I don’t have time to explain,” she hastily whispered. “But I need you to read this, and go where it tells you. I promise you the journal will answer all of your questions. Everything in there will explain the truth. But, like it did for me, having this information is going to make you a target. A big one. So I need you to go and get your siblings, and run. Run away as fast as you can, until you are safe.”

I stood shocked. I was so incredibly confused, and I wasn’t sure if this whole thing was a prank. Then my brain snapped back into reality, and I heard the footsteps beating closer to us through the park again. Even if what Maddy had told me was fake, I knew that I heard men with guns approaching. And that was definitely real.

“Go! Now!” Maddy yelled.

This time I didn’t hesitate. I tore through the park, holding my bag tightly. As I zoomed through the gate, I heard a deafening bang. I turned for a split second, and my eyes fell upon the girl lying on the ground in a pool of blood. I quickened my pace, never again turning back. Not even to see if anyone was chasing me. All I could think was to run as fast as I could.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity of sprinting, I reached my house, my lungs burning inside my chest. I stumbled through the door and saw Sofi and Jaxon sitting on the couch watching the news. Before anything I turned around and double bolted the door. I heard the small lady on the fluorescent screen going on about another round of reports for missing children. I shut the TV off and turned to them.

“Guys. I need you to go and each pack a bag, only with things you need. Food, clothes, and other necessities but nothing else. I’ll be back in about half an hour.”

I didn’t give them a chance to respond or ask any questions before I turned away and went to my room. As I went to sit on my bed, I scrambled to get the journal out of my bag. The front cover was dusty, worn down leather with intricate designs carved into it. I slowly opened the journal. Across the first page was scrawled:

If you are reading this, then this journal has been given to you. It is not certain whether you are the first, second, or hundredth person to possess this journal but one thing is certain. It was not given to you by accident. I have found out many secrets involving our government and the war. I beg you do not read this journal if you don’t want to have a large target on your back. If that is the case do not

flip to the next page. Find another person and pass it off to them, and move on with your life. However. If you're willing to risk your life to possibly save yourself and your country, then read on. And if you do happen to die at fault of this journal, don't let it get into the wrong hands. Trust me, when the time comes you will know to whom you need to give it, as I'm sure did the person from whom you received it. And with that... good luck.

—Anonymous

I put down the journal. I wasn't sure how legit this was. But if this note was real, reading any further could mean life or death. Of course, I had always been cursed with the largest dose of curiosity, so I slowly picked the journal back up. I turned to the second page. The top of the page read;

Brace yourself. There is no way you can be expecting what I'm about to tell you.

And with that I took a deep breath and began reading.

An hour later I closed the journal, my face blank. I had just finished reading every single entry, the last one signed, *From Maddy*. It talked a lot about each journal carrier's story, and their travels in hopes of reaching a place, which they called The Sanctuary. Apparently it was a safe place for kids to escape to from danger. To escape from the government.

All these years I had been hearing about how great and helpful our government was. And how our President Patrick Jones was such a good person, and far from corrupt compared to other leaders. However after reading the discoveries made by whoever first wrote in this journal, I realized that was not the case. The writer claimed to have been working in a government position for President Jones for decades, spying undercover for the organization who formed The Sanctuary. Unfortunately he was found out before he could get all of his discovered information to the organization. So he wrote this journal, in hopes that someone could make the delivery for him.

For years everyone had been bewildered by the ability of the military to rise up, and fight in the war stronger than ever. In the past year there had been a shockingly low number of our soldiers who died, compared to every other country. But it turns out, maybe their increasing strength was not just a miracle. For over a decade, the President, along with government scientists and officials, had been

working together to genetically modify their military. They were trying to create an invincible army.

Of course they couldn't go right in and do the procedure on their soldiers. At first they apparently just tested on rats, and other small animals. When those tests were successful, they decided to take it to the next level. They still didn't want to sacrifice anybody who was fighting for them in the war, so instead they turned to the most vulnerable, easy to manipulate subjects that they could find, to closely model their soldiers. Children.

With many of the kids in the country having their parents overseas and enlisted in the war, it was far too easy for them to abduct these children for their experiments. They brought in thousands of children every week, most of whom remained unreported. If they were reported missing, someone would be sent to try and cover up the story, just like what had happened with Isaac. Once they collected a large enough group of subjects, they began testing. But it failed. It failed for a long time. They would bring in a new batch of around one hundred kids every day, just to have to dig one hundred more graves that night. But President Jones never quit. He was determined to make the experiments work, and win the war. So it continued. For years, upon years. It almost always failed, resulting in thousands of deaths. And even when it worked they had to kill the child so that their secret wouldn't be let out.

If this journal were brought to the organization, they may be able to shut down the whole operation. And President Jones knew that, which was why whoever had the journal was such a big target. Whoever had the journal was wanted dead.

* * *

Over a year later Sofi, Jaxon, and I were at the end of our journey. Since I had discovered the journal, which seemed like a lifetime ago, a lot had happened. It turned out that when Maddy had shouted my name that day in the park, it didn't quite help to keep my identity safe from the Government. Those two men (not surprisingly) were working for President Jones. We had been chased through forests, shot at while we slept in small caves of rocks, and been close to death too many times to count. Sofi and Jaxon were still as inseparable as ever. I was getting ready to wake them up for the final stretch of our trip to the Sanctuary. I hadn't quite explained

the full extent of the situation to them, as it would have gone a bit over their heads. But they were smart enough to realize that it was a serious situation, and that they had to focus.

“Alright guys, get up!” I said as I shook them out of their sleep. “Come on, you know what day it is!”

They both sat up, exhausted, leaning on the tree we had slept next to the night before.

“Huh?” Sofi asked, half asleep.

“What day is it?” Jaxon asked, confused.

Sure they were only eight, but I always got really ticked off when they didn’t pay attention the first time I said things.

“We are going to arrive at the Sanctuary today,” I responded, irritated. “But guys, we have to be careful. I’ve told you what we have to make it through before we get there.”

“Wait, tell us one more time,” Sofi said, still confused.

“We have to make it through the X Zone,” I told her.

The X Zone was a heavily armed military zone, full of officials trying to catch as many kids as they could for testing. However for us that meant it was full of people trying to kill us. They didn’t want anyone to remain alive who had even a clue of what they were doing. And I could only assume that they knew who I was, and that I was their target.

“We’ll be able to see the entrance of the Sanctuary right after we get through the X Zone. It’s only about the size of a few football fields. I want you guys to just stay low, and run as fast as you can. It’s not that far, you just need to be careful. You’re both small so it will be harder for anybody to see you. Just try not to screw anything up.”

The twins were finally fully awake, so we all collected our things and started moving forward, trying to keep our heads down. We silently walked along the edge of the forest, blending in as best as we could.

After we walked for around an hour, I could see a clearing open up ahead of us. I looked around at the tall, looming trees we were weaving through, and saw red X’s painted on many of their trunks. This was it. This was the final point. This was the moment that determined if we would make it... or if we would die.

I turned to Sofi and Jaxon.

“All right, this is it guys,” I whispered. “I need you guys to be smart, okay? Just stay safe, and try your absolute hardest to make it

to the other side. I know that I've been a bit intense with you, but just know that I am so proud of you both of you for making it this far. I love you guys."

I pulled them both into a tight hug, knowing good and well that this could have been the last time I would ever hug my brother and sister. A tear rolled down my cheek.

"Okay," I said with a deep shaking breath, "Let's go."

I peeked my head out into the clearing where the X Zone started. I could see several large men armed with machine guns standing out in the field. I nodded my head slightly towards them, so that Sofi and Jaxon would know where they should avoid. Then, I started running.

I ran faster than I had ever run in my life, Sofi and Jaxon struggling to keep up behind me. My feet were pounding the ground almost as hard as my heart was pounding in my chest. That was when the first gunshot rang. It brought me back to the day when I had first become involved in this entire thing. I took a slow breath in and out, as I heard several more bullets hit the ground several yards away from my feet.

As I pushed my legs harder and faster, I stopped short when I heard a scream come from behind me. I whipped around to see Jaxon sprawled on the ground. Blood was trickling from his head. Sofi rushed over to him, screaming between sobs.

"Sofi, we have to go!" I pleaded, tears welling in my eyes. "Now, Sofi!"

She refused to move. She fell to the ground, hugging Jaxon's body. I saw two men rushing in from the corner of my eye, and I tried as hard as I could to pull Sofi up, but she wouldn't budge. At that moment, I had to make one of the hardest decisions of my life. I had to leave my sister behind.

I turned around and began to run farther away, wind whipping me in the face, drying the tears that were falling down my cheeks. I heard another shot fire, and suddenly Sofi's sobbing came to an abrupt stop.

The world seemed to be moving in slow motion, as I moved my feet one after another. I couldn't hear anything except a sharp ringing in my ears, and I could barely see through the stinging tears in my eyes. So I just blindly kept moving forward, hoping to reach the other side. I was coming close to the end. I could see where a line of

brush thickened and another forest began at the end of the X Zone, where I could conceal myself.

I was running without a thought in my mind. It was completely empty. I had just lost everything that was important to me. I clutched the journal in my hand as I approached the end. I threw it as far as I could, in hopes of giving the men no chance to get their hands on it, and possibly getting it far enough for someone from the Organization to discover it. I dove to the edge of the forest when — Boom!

* * *

Hey.

I'm Harmony.

And I'm going to tell my story.

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I, Too, Am America Gabriela Mendoza

I, too, am America
I am the bilingual sister.
People underestimate me,
Think I won't become someone
Important in life
Just because, yo soy hispana
Think I'm going to quit school.
I'm not going to
Let that get to me
Because I'm not going to
Give up instead I'm going
To put in more effort
Y voy a crecer más fuerte
Tomorrow,
I'll be someone,
Someone important in life
And they'll see how beautiful being
The bilingual sister truly is.

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Broken Hearted

Anna Saravia

Oh
I see
I'm confused
It hurts
You hold me close
But you hold her closer
You broke me
Why?
Why do I see you with someone else?
You liar
Why were you with me then,
To break a girl's heart?
A girl that loves you
The you've achieved your goal
You broke me

Music in my ears
Wrapped in my blankets
Tears fall to my pillow
Not knowing what to do

The songs hitting my deep feelings
Making me cry
Making me feel like cloud
Making me want to get out of this house or this world

Please don't let me hear your voice
Please don't break me even more
Please don't get any closer to me
Please don't.

someone help
please
someone comfort me
please

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